

HAK aarticle in the Tribune, Sept. 24, 1984, reprinted from LAT:
"The prospects for stability in a nuclear-endangered world"

"The nuclear age forces the statesman to navigate between the callousness which reduces mass slaughter to a mathematical equation of technicians and the nihilism which abdicates to totalitarianism in the same of survival."

The first callousness--which HAK is about to embrace--is that of Herman Kahn. HAK is about to endorse ABM for the same reasons that led Kahn to advocate Civil Defense. The "nihilism" is what HAK has always seen in "pacifism" or "nuclear pacifism": "abdicating to the challenge of the more ruthless, aggressive or violent." This is what he sees as the inevitable consequence of a unwillingness to threaten nuclear first-use, or to stand up to threats by others of first-use. (Note that it has been, historically, the Soviet Union that has backed down to such threats. What does this say about which has been the more ruthless, aggressive, etc.--even while being more democratic!

HAK goes on:

"Since the ABM treaty was signed it has become clear that to rely on a strategy of mutual annihilation based on unopposed offensive weapons raises profound and political issues. Has a president the right to expose our people forever to the vagaries of an increasing number of volatile decision-makers? Such a course involves the near certainty of a growth in pacifism or the risk of a holocaust as a result of miscalculation or the gradual escalation of peripheral crises."

Once again, the growth of "pacificism" is a contingency to be feared and avoided, along with the risk of a holocaust. Yet is a risk of a holocaust to be avoided, in the nuclear era? In the next sentence HAK grants "that a perfect defense of our population is almost certainly unattainable," as earlier he states that "a foolproof defense of civilian population--that seemed implied by that [Star Wars] speech--is a mirage. Even a 90% effective defense would still let enough weapons through to destroy an unacceptable proportion of our population."

Since the proportion of our population that would still be at risk from 10% of the Soviet warheads (about 900-1000 warheads) would be close to 100%, it is reassuring that HAK regards this as "unacceptable." However, would not a proportion even much less than this count as a "holocaust"? E.g., the number--say, 10 million--that would be killed by a single large warhead on the New York metropolitan area!

HAK makes a useful distinction between "miscalculation" and "the gradual escalation of peripheral crises": the latter, the real risk of holocaust, is usually not mentioned explicitly and is only misleadingly included implicitly under "miscalculation." Of course, HAK's policy would explicitly threaten and prepare for such escalation by the US, as the alternative to "pacifism" = "surrender."

"Even granting--as I do--that a perfect defense of our population is almost certainly unattainable, the existence of some defence means that the attacker must plan on saturating it. This massively complicates the attacker's calculations. Anything that magnifies doubt inspires hesitation and adds to deterrence

It is this consideration, which he had ignored earlier when he "instinctively resisted the proposition that it [the ABM treaty] be modified" which makes HAK realize that his earlier argument was "superficial." But the last proposition obviously depends on "other things being equal"--which, obviously, they are not. First, the existence of "some" defense has a much greater effect on the opponent's ability to assure retaliation than on his first-strike capability. Especially when it is matched by the opponent's own defensive systems--as it surely would be, as a consequence of the untrammelled defense race--this could be an incitement to preemption in a crisis. Preemption by either side.

Moreover, the most likely effect by far is that the opponent simply does plan to "saturate" the defense, thus spurring a race--on both sides--in additional offensive weapons. Depending on their nature these may further encourage preemption. Even if they do not, they are overwhelmingly likely to cancel out any "insurance" effect that may have been gained on either side by the defensive weapons. (Yankelovich reports in his latest Foreign Affairs article that the majority of Americans would expect exactly this effect--indicating that their argumentation is less superficial than HAK's.)

HAK's next argument--that against "leaders of the Khadafy variety" "substantially complete defense against third nuclear countries could be possible well into the next century" is equally superficial. The ABM defense would be effective only against ICBMs, not against cruise missiles, planes, sabotage or even against SLBMs.

"Perhaps the most compelling argument is the possible beneficial effect of some missile defense on arms control." This despite the almost certain escalation of both offensive and defensive arms that would result...from the abrogation of the single arms control argument that has now been ratified with significant effect! It may be true, as HAK says, that "Arms control theory is now at a dead end." HAK is right that, "The reductions proposed by the Reagan administration would add little to stability." Indeed, they would certainly decrease stability. But it is a familiar lie that "the freeze which is its alternative would perpetuate what needs correction." The freeze--can it be that HAK is not clear on this?--would "perpetuate" nothing, except perhaps life on earth. And it would only do that if it were accompanied, as its advocate propose and intend, by massive reductions, starting with those weapons, such as the MX and its Soviet counterparts, which Reagan proposes to preserve. In other

words, reductions of a sort other than those Reagan has proposed are desirable immediately. HAK's assertion that "Under present conditions the reductions which can be verified are relatively small" is thoroughly inscrutable. There is no problem whatever of verifying the elimination of land-based ICBMs--the chief destabilizing elements in the current balance.

Hak proceeds to argue that if strategic warheads of both sides were reduced to a few hundred--a truly "revolutionary approach to reduction of offensive forces by agreement" which he pretends would be permitted by the existence of defensive forces, which would almost surely have the opposite effect--then "the side capable of hiding even [sic] a thousand warheads might be able to disarm its opponent by a surprise attack or blackmail him into submission when the clandestine weapons are revealed." But this calculation depends on the few hundred remaining weapons being vulnerable to attack. Both contingencies disappear if they are based in submarines, especially for the US. To discuss stability in terms simply of numbers of warheads, not basing and vulnerability, is not just superficial, it is an inanity worthy of a rank beginner or of our START negotiators or someone equally disingenuous.

HAK concludes, unsurprisingly, that "We should not commit ourselves at this point to the demilitarization of space; We should proceed actively with research and development and forego moratoria [i.e., our development programs should include tests--at the cost of making a race in antisatellite weapons inescapable]; and [inscrutably] we should be prepared to negotiate over arms control of all [sic: underlined in original] defensive weapons.

As HAK points out, "both superpowers should have an interest to prevent war by miscalculation and irresponsible third nuclear powers from blackmailing them with nuclear weapons." But defensive weapons would not prevent, or reduce the risk, of war by miscalculation nor prevent "irresponsible" third powers from the implicit threat of nuclear attack by means other than ICBM. Indeed, such small "mad" powers would seem peculiarly hard to deter by subtle calculations of added uncertainty due to defensive systems even against ICBMs.

HAK concludes that since "There seems general concern [sic] with the precariousness, both physical and psychological [and moral?] of a balance based on large unopposed offensive systems," "Some limited defense--yet to be analyzed--coupled with a revolutionary approach to reduction of offensive forces by agreement may adnace us toward the elusive goal of stability...." thus moving the superpower quest for peace to "a joint enterprise."

He manages to overlook that a revolutionary approach--one which he himself implicitly advocated in an earlier Time essay!--would do this better than the approach he advocates here, by

eliminating as rapidly as possible most or all of the land-based systems on both sides. [In fact, it would be a major advance toward stability if the US should do this unilaterally!] A further reduction in the sea-based forces down to levels that would not threaten nuclear winter would be a decisive lessening in precariousness. Neither of these is made more likely--quite the contrary, they are almost surely ruled out--by the introduction of defensive systems (along with the abrogation of our only significant arms control achievement). And even if, improbably, the two approaches could be combined, the stabilizing effects of the reductions would be lessened by the presence of defensive systems. (HAK's claim to the contrary is based on the argument that reductions could be more easily verified, since it would be necessary for a violator to conceal a greater number of "warheads" to overcome the defended forces. But there is no problem of verifying, anyway, the delivery systems--ICBMs--which are combatted by ABMS and Star Wars systems; the ability to conceal "warheads" in abstraction from delivery systems is irrelevant.)